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How many Palestinians were actually expelled in 1948?



In [the previous article](#) on the issue of Palestinian exodus in 1948, I've shown that contrary to the claims made by anti-Zionist "academics", there was no master Zionist





So if it was not an “ethnic cleansing master plan” that caused the Palestinians to leave Palestine, what did cause?

According to the alternative version proposed by anti-Zionists, even if there was no official plan by the Zionist leadership to expel the Palestinians, what mainly caused the Palestinians to leave was deportations and violence perpetrated by the Haganah and the Jewish underground on the population.

Their main proof is allegedly an “[IDF intelligence report from 1948](#)” and an article by Benny Morris “The Causes and Character of the Arab Exodus from Palestine: The Israel Defense Forces Intelligence Branch Analysis of June 1948”.

Allegedly, they proves that at least 70% of Palestinian refugees between December 1, 1947 and June 1, 1948 fled because of violence and deportation by the Zionist forces.

Turning to the scholarly literature, we learn that far from being an “intelligence report,” this document was an unclassified “review” by anonymous authors found in the private papers of Aharon Cohen, who was “convicted of treason in 1960 for illegal contacts with Soviet agents” — surely “the last place to look for official IDF documents,” as historian Shabtai Teveth observes. [1]

Even “[Morris flagged several factual errors](#), but found the report to be reliable overall.”

So what does this document really says? To what extent does it reflect what really motivated the Palestinians to leave?

Seemingly it's clear, the document says that 70% of the 391,000 Palestinians fled because of the actions of the Israeli paramilitary actions,

55% by the Haganah / IDF

15% by the “Dissidents” Irgun / Lehi

But what exactly does “actions” mean in the context of this document?





Quote from the document:

“It has, however, been proven, that actions had no lesser effect on neighboring communities as they did on the community that was the direct target of the action. The evacuation of a certain village as a result of us attacking it swept with it many neighboring villages.”

Villages emptied that were never even attacked highlighted in yellow (of the ones actually attacked notes show some were just searched and also many the villagers actually returned, and some non highlighted weren't attacked but had psychological warfare)

Document: 1948-1949, 1948-1949, 1948-1949

Degree of Evacuation				
Date	Village	Full/Partial	Evacuation cause	Evacuation trajectory, comments
22.12	Tiberias	-	Fear	From outlining area into central areas
1.2.48	Samakh	P	Tension, as located on crossroads	Mostly the wealthy, women and children are evacuated. 50% had left before the complete evacuation.
5.3	Ubeidiyya	F	Fear as a result of being surrounded by Jews	To the area of Nazareth
15.3	Adamiyya	F	Transjordan government orders	Since they are Persian, many to Persia and the rest to Transjordan
6.4	Sirin	F	Transjordan government orders	Area of Nazareth and Transjordan
6.4	'Ulam	F	" "	" " "
6.4	Hadatha	F	" "	" " "
6.4	Ma'dhar	F	" "	" " "
15.4	Samakh	F	Fear when they heard about the action in Tiberias	To border villages in Transjordan. Bedouins.
18.4	Tiberias	F	Our action. Lack of local leaders. The	Nazareth, Lubyah, Hammah – Syria, Transjordan, Lebanon

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Akevot عكيدات





Date	Village	Full/Partial	Evacuation cause	Evacuation trajectory, comments
18.1	Mughr al-Kheit	F	Our reprisal	To Syria, after stealing our sheep herd
"	Mansurat al-Kheit	"	" "	To Syria
12.2	Shawka	"	" "	To Shawka Fuqa, returned shortly after.
26.3	Khisas	P		
29.3	Khiyam al-Walid	F	Participated in attack on Lehavot	To Syria. Some returned later.
7.4	Madahil			To the Golan
20.4	Arab a-Zubeldi	F	General departure of Mughrabis	To Lebanon
20.4	'Ulmaniya	F	Our action	Many killed
21.4	Huseiniyya	F	Effect of our action in 'Ulmaniya	
22.4	Kirad al-Baqqara	F	Effect of our action " and fear of invasion.	To Syria. Some joined the Syrian army
22.4	Kirad al-Ghanname	F	Effect of action and fear of invasion	To Syria. Some joined the Syrian army
30.4	Madahil	F	Prior to attack on Kfar Szold	To the Golan. Knew about the attack and fled beforehand.
1.5	Arab al-'Azaziyyat	F	Attack on Kfar Szold	To Banyas. Joined gangs.
1.5	Khiyam al-Walid	F	" "	To Seida-Syria. Fled completely after returning earlier.
1.5	Hamra	F	Attack on Lehavot, our harassment	To Syria and Dirbashiyya.
1.5	Ghuraba	P	Attack on Lehavot, our harassment	Participated in attack on Lehavot. To Syria and Dirbashiyya.
1.5	Muftakhira	P	Attack on Lehavot	Participated in attack on Lehavot. In Dirbashiyya. Returned later.
2.5	Ein Zaitun	F	Destruction of village by us	Many killed
2.5	Biriyya	F	" "	" "
2.5	Qaltiyya	P	Harassment, threat of attack and convoy passage	Returned later
3.5	Hunin	F	Fear of our attacks	In Lebanon
4.5	Arab a-Zanghariyya	F	Searches by us	Syria (?)
4.5	Arab al-Qudeiriyya	F	" " "	"
4.5	Arab as-Samakiya	F	" " "	"
9.5	Ja'una	F	As Safed faltered	Ras al-Ahmar. Our actions in Safed had an effect.
9.5	Deishum	F	Concentration of gangs our them and our actions	To Lebanon
10.5	Safed	F	Occupied	Beirut, Damascus, Huran. Critical impact on the vicinity.
10.5	Akbara	F	Many killed	
10.5	Zahiriyya	F	Safed impact (?)	
10.5	Abil al-Qamh	F	Fear of invasion, fall of Safed.	To Lebanon. Some fled in the beginning of the incidents.
11.5	Qaddita	F	Fall of Safed impact	Sa'sa' – outside borders of State of Israel.





19.4	Arab al-Zubayd	F	earlier. Tiberias effect.	To Ein Mahil. Sometimes come down to work fields
21.4	Samra & Nuqeib	F	Tiberias effect	To Syrian mountains. The village are tenant farmers. Syrian origin
21.4	Khirbat al-Qadish		" "	To Luby and Samakh
21.4	Ghuweir Abu Shusha	P	" "	
21.4	Arab Shajara	P	" "	Nazareth
21.4	Samakh	P	Our attack on Samakh	To Transjordan. The foreigners did not let everyone leave.
22.4	Majdal	F	Out attack. Tiberias and Samakh effect	To Transjordan. Transported in buses.
22.4	Kafr Sabt	F	Tiberias and Samakh effect	
23.4	Nasir a-Din	F	Appearance of gang	Luby and vicinity
28.4	Samakh	F	Occupation of police	To Hamah Transjordan
"	Ghuwier	F	Fall of Tiberias had very strong impact	
28.4	Abu Shusha	F	Fall of Samakh	To the mountains in the area
1.5	a-Tabigha	F	Samakh effect	To Syria and Safed
6.5	Arab Shajara	F	Our attack	To the Nazareth area.



11.5	Khalisa	F	Asked for agreement with fall of Safed. Refused. Fled.	To 'Udaysa, Lebanon. There had been an agreement with them previously. Kept well.
11.5	Buwalziyya	F	Fled with the evacuation of Khalisa	To Lebanon. Afraid because they were on our traffic line.
12.5	Sammu'i	F	Fall of Safed	
14.5	Na'ima	F	" "	To Syria. Entered negotiations beforehand, but fall of Safed determined.
14.5	Shawka	F	" " fear of invasion	To Syria
16.5	Muftakhira	F	[page 1 of Annex No. 1] The Sheikh was afraid and left with everyone	This is the final flight, after they returned once.
16.5	Nabi Yusha'	F	Our attack on Police station	
19.5	Qaitiyya	F	Threats and our whispering operations by us	Final exit, since some returned.
21.5	Zuq al-Fawqani	F	Our Whispering operation and mortars	Effect of mortars strong.
21.5	Lazzaza	F	Our Whispering operation	To Syria
24.5	Manshiyya	F	Our Whispering operation	To Lebanon.
24.5	Zawiya	F	Our attack	Some to Hula marshes, some to Syria.
24.5	Ammuqa a-Tahta	F	Our action	To Lebanon
24.5	Ammuqa a-Fuqa	F	" "	" "
25.5	Khisas	F	Whispering operation and Safed effect	To Syria
25.5	Saliha	F	Our warnings and Whispering operation	Some to the marshes and some to Syria
25.5	Mansura	F	Our Whispering operation	To Syria
25.5	Balsamun	F	" "	"
25.5	'Abbasiyya	F	Flight from Mansura impacted	To Syria
25.5	Dawwara	F	Whispering operation	To Dirbashiyya
25.5	Salithiyya	F	Wanted to negotiate. We did not turn up. Afraid	Friendly village, fear because we did not turn up to negotiate.
26.5	Fir'im	F	Our attack on them	To Lebanon
26.5	Qabba'a	F	Our attack on them	"
26.5	Marus	F	Our attack on them and in the area	" (?)
28.5	Malikiyas	F	Our operation	To Lebanon. Wanted to return and





In fact, the document accurately explains that:

The impact of the fall of large villages, centers, towns or forts with a large concentration of communities around them is particularly apparent. The fall of Tiberias, Safed, Samakh, Jaffa, Haifa and Acre produced many large migration waves. The psychological motivation at work here was “If the mighty have fallen.... “. In conclusion, it can be said that at least 55% of the overall migration movement was motivated by our actions and their impact.”

The same goes for the activities of the Dissidents:

“The Dissidents’ effect on the evacuation of Jaffa city and the Jaffa rural area is clear and definitive — decisive and critical impact among migration factors here. If we were to assess the contribution made by the Dissidents as factors in the evacuation of Arabs in Eretz Yisrael we would find that they had about 15% direct impact on the total intensity of the migration.”

It is noted that the fall of the Arab towns of Tiberias, Safed, Samakh, Jaffa, Haifa and Acre were the main cause of the Palestinians’ exodus, so the question arises, why did the Palestinians flee these towns?

Tiberias- Tiberias’ 6,000-strong Arab community had been forced out by its own leaders, against local Jewish wishes.

On the morning of April 18, 1948, Arab representatives arrived at the Tiberias police station and informed the British commander that they were seeking to leave the city with their weapons.

Three reasons led to the surrender of the Arabs in Tiberias:

- Disappointment from the surrounding villages who did not come to their aid

- Inability to transfer supplies to the Arab population in the Old City compared to the ability of Jews to transfer supplies to their forces.





A fortnight after the exodus, British High Commissioner Cunningham reported to London that the Tiberias Jews “would welcome [the] Arabs back”

Ignoring pleas by the local Jewish leadership to stay put, the Arabs — acting on the orders of the Nazareth National Committee and on the advice of local British commanders — chose to leave Tiberias en masse and were evacuated by the British army [2]

Safed- Having declined an offer by Gen. Hugh Stockwell, commander of the British forces in northern Palestine, to mediate a truce, the Arabs responded to the British evacuation of the city with a heavy assault on the tiny Jewish community, less than a quarter their size. “Upon the British evacuation on April 16, we occupied all the city’s strategic positions: the Citadel, the Government House, and the police post on Mount Canaan,” recalled a local Arab fighter.

“We were the majority, and the feeling among us was that we would defeat the Jews with sticks and rocks.”

What this prognosis failed to consider was the tenacity of the Jewish resolve to hold on to Safed, awarded by the partition resolution to the prospective Jewish state, on the one hand, and the intensity of Arab flight psychosis, on the other. As tens of thousands of Arabs streamed out of Tiberias and Haifa within days of the British evacuation of Safed, members of the city’s leading families and ordinary residents alike decided that now was the time to escape — which is probably when Abbas’s affluent family fled. In the words of a British intelligence report, “Such is their state of fear [that] Arabs are beginning to evacuate Safed although the Jews have not yet attacked them.”

In a desperate bid to save the day, a delegation of local notables traveled to Damascus, only to be reprimanded as cowards fleeing the battlefield and ordered to keep on fighting. A subsequent visit by mayor Zaki Qadura to the royal court in Amman was far more affable yet equally inconclusive. While King Abdullah was evidently moved by the mayor’s pleas, he argued that there was nothing he could do before the termination of





Damascus some 130 pan-Arab fighters (of the so-called Arab Liberation Army) were sent to Safed, arriving in the city on May 9.

This was too little, too late. As fighting intensified, the trickle of escapees turned into a hemorrhage.

On May 2, following the bombing of the Arab quarter by the deafening albeit highly ineffective home-made “David’s mortar,” scores of Arabs fled Safed en route to the Jordan Valley, accompanied by a substantial number of Arab Liberation Army fighters. Four days later, the ALA’s regional commander reported that “the majority of the inhabitants have left [Safed’s neighboring] villages. Their morale has collapsed completely.”

Heavy artillery bombardments of Jewish neighborhoods failed to do the trick, and as the final battle for the city was joined on the night of May 9 a mass flight ensued. By the time fighting was over the next morning, Safed’s entire Arab population had taken to the road; a day later, Hagana patrols reported that “the [Arab] quarter had emptied to a man,” with evacuees leaving behind “a huge quantity of weapons and ammunition.” [3]

Abbas: Arabs of Safed left Israel by choice in 1948, becoming refugees





Samakh- Following the conquest of the city Tiberias on the 18th of April 1948, Samakh was emptied, however some villagers already left in the early months of the war. The Syrian shop owners in Samakh, south of the town, fled on or just before 22 April, and truckloads of women and children were seen leaving the village on 24 April. After the fall of Tiberias, the Golani brigade shifted its focus towards Samakh, preparing for the occupation. Israeli historian, Benny Morris, stated that the Golani brigade had torched an unidentified village in order to practice for the capture of Samakh. Regarding the capture itself, the History of the Haganah wrote that on the 28th of April the police station in Samakh was occupied and the villagers fled. [4]

The fall of Tiberias and Haifa into Jewish hands generated a chain reaction in smaller towns like Samakh. The panic in larger villages in turn effected dependent hamlets. Late in April, Samakh collapsed under the combined pressure of a Jewish assault and a delay in the arrival of Arab reinforcements. When the promised assistance was slow to materialize, the inhabitants evacuated non-combatants and joined them shortly afterwards. During the attack on the adjacent police fortress, ALA combatants at the site appealed to Samakh for help, but by that time the village was empty. As a result, stories spread about the “leaders’ betrayal” — accusing them of accepting bribes from the Jews before the assault. [5]

Jaffa- Hours after the UN resolution to partition Palestine into Jewish and Arab states, sniper fire was exchanged by both Jewish and Arab fighters between Jaffa and Tel Aviv. In the ensuing 5 months, while the British officially maintained the Mandate, these attacks led to the deaths of over 1,000 inhabitants of Tel Aviv.

In *City of Oranges: An Intimate History of Arabs and Jews in Jaffa* (W.W. Norton & Co), journalist Adam LeBor detailed the flight of Jaffa’s Arabs. LeBor, a journalist who has written for *The Independent* and *The Times* (London), and has, interestingly, also published a number of book reviews at *The New York Times*, reported in his book on Jaffa:

On 8 December 1947, after several days of skirmishes between Arab fighters and the





provided leadership in the testing days ahead, relocated to relatives or to their summer homes in Cairo and Beirut, believing they would return once the situation calmed down. Flight, like panic, is infectious. When Jaffa's artisans and workers saw that their bosses were leaving, they too began to desert their homes. The Haganah's intelligence service reported that inhabitants of Manshiyyeh and Abu Kabir, to the south, were moving out of the city, pushing handcarts full of their possessions. (page 114)

The next month, after a deadly attack targeting the Arab High Committee but which took the lives of 26 mostly civilians, LeBor said:

The exodus of the middle class further accelerated, angry accusation of abandoning Jaffa following in their wake. 'Whoever could leave [Jaffa] has left, there is fear everywhere, and there is no safety,' an Arab informant told Elias Sasson, head of the Jewish Agency's Arab Affairs department, in January 1948.

LeBor recounts the fateful day of Sunday, April 25, 1948, when fighting for Jaffa itself began. He tells of the flight of the Hammami family, and son Fadwa remembers:

In one day, my parents decided to leave. But not for good, because we left everything in the house. They said we were going on holiday, to Lebanon . . . (page 125):

Ismail Abou-Shehade also relays (page 127):

For Ismail Abou-Shehade, too, the memories of the exodus are unforgettable. 'If you ask me about this time, I can tell you about it, like it happened an hour ago. I can still see the people leaving, the women and children shouting, "To the sea, to the sea!"

In addition, LeBor reports about Jaffa's Arab mayor at the time, Yousef Heikal, who himself abandoned the city:

Heikal returned on 28 April. "Then he gathered us again. He said that Jaffa was going to be occupied by the Jews soon, since there was no defence — no weapons — and nothing





and people could leave for free. The Arab countries were responsible. After a week there was nothing left but cats and dogs. We few families who stated went to live in the orange groves.”

Too scared to remain in Jaffa once the British departed, thousands more left at the beginning of May, either by sea or with the help of the British as they cross the Haganah lines.

LeBor’s detailed book contains considerable description of the Arab flight from Jaffa, and no indication of any forced expulsions. Historian Dr. Petra Marquardt-Bigman has noted that Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, a political science professor who left Jaffa in May 1948 (and was also quoted by LeBor), likewise documented the flight of Jaffa’s Arabs. He wrote in an Al-Ahram special from 1998 that the Arab National Committee levied a tax on those who left, an exodus which began with the wealthy. He himself volunteered to help collect the fee:

I worked in a branch of the committee based in the headquarters of the Muslim Youth Association near the port of Jaffa. Our job consisted mainly of harassing people to dissuade them from leaving, and when they insisted, we would begin bargaining over what they should pay, according to how much luggage they were carrying with them and how many members of the family there were. At first we set the taxes high. Then as the situation deteriorated, we reduced the rates, especially when our friends and relatives began to be among those leaving.

We continued collecting this tax until 23 April, when the combined force of the Haganah and the Irgun succeeded in defeating the Arab forces stationed in the Manshiya quarter adjacent to Southern Tel-Aviv. On that day, as we realised that an attack on the centre of Jaffa was imminent, I and my family decided that they had to be evacuated temporarily. We rented a van, into which we crammed all the women and young children and sent them to Nablus.



-Sir Henry Gurney, May 1948

By the time the Irgun Zvai Leumi (National Military Organization, or IZL), the small militant organization headed by Menachem Begin, future prime minister of Israel, began its offensive in the morning hours of April 25, inaugurating what was to be the final round in the battle for Jaffa, the city's 70,000 strong Arab population had dwindled to about 20,000–30,000 residents.

Having failed to protect its constituents, the municipality was reduced to organizing their departure by both land and sea. In mid-April, for example, a special convoy for the transfer of all municipal officials to Amman was organized. At the same time the municipality approached the British authorities for assistance in the evacuation of the city's residents. "Jaffa Municipality has asked that arrangements be made for evacuation of Arab civilians by sea from Jaffa to Beirut," Cunningham reported to London on May 1"

The request seemed to have the desired effect. Later that day two passenger ships arrived in Jaffa and began embarking Arab residents anxious to flee the city. The following day, two more ships ferried away the wealthier residents who had hitherto failed to flee the city, while the lower classes had to make do with the boat service to Gaza

At 3:30 pm on Thursday, May 13, 1948, after brief but intensive negotiations, the remaining members of Jaffa's Arab leadership sat down with Hagana representatives to sign an agreement on the city's capitulation. "This is not a time to rejoice," read a special Hagana communiqué issued to mark the momentous event. "The city of Jaffa is almost empty. We promised the [remaining] residents a peaceful and dignified life and it is incumbent on each and every one of us to uphold this commitment; this is a matter of honor and the hard moral core of our army."

[6]





when the British suddenly decided to evacuate most of the town and each of the two parties moved in quickly to try to fill the vacuum and assert control. But the first thing the documents show is that Arab flight from Haifa began well *before* the outbreak of these hostilities, and even before the UN's November 29, 1947 partition resolution.

On October 23, over a month earlier, a British intelligence brief was already noting that “leading Arab personalities are acting on the assumption that disturbances are near at hand, and have already evacuated their families to neighboring Arab countries.” By November 21, as the General Assembly was getting ready to vote, not just “leading Arab personalities” but “many Arabs of Haifa” were reported to be removing their families. And as the violent Arab reaction to the UN resolution built up, eradicating any hope of its peaceful enforcement, this stream of refugees turned into a flood.

Thus it was that, by mid-December 1947, some 15,000–20,000 people, almost a third of the city's Arab population, had fled, creating severe adversity for those remaining. Economic and commercial activity ground to a halt as the wealthier classes converted their assets to gold or U.S. dollars and transferred them abroad. Merchants and industrialists moved their businesses to Egypt, Syria, or Lebanon, causing both unemployment and shortages in basic necessities. Entire areas were emptied of their residents.

These difficulties were exacerbated by deep cleavages within the Arab community itself. The town's Christian Arabs, erecting clear boundaries between themselves and Muslims, refused to feed the Syrian, Lebanese, and Iraqi recruits arriving to wrest the city from the Jews, asserted their determination not to attack Jewish forces unless attacked first, and established a special guard to protect themselves from Muslim violence. Added to this was a growing lawlessness, including pandemic looting of deserted properties.

At the time, the official leadership of Haifa Arabs was a fifteen-member body called the National Committee. Although the Committee strove to curb the mass flight, urging Haifa's Arabs to stay put and castigating those who fled — occasionally, these warnings





To be sure, the Committee itself hardly constituted a model of commitment or self-sacrifice. For one thing, scarcely a meeting was attended by all members. For another, affluent though they were, Committee members, while taking care to reimburse themselves for the smallest expense, rarely contributed financially to the national struggle. Transcripts of the Committee's meetings do not exactly convey a grasp of the severity of the situation: they tend to be taken up instead with trivialities, from the placement of an office partition to the payment to a certain individual of £1.29 in travel expenses.

Even when the Committee did try to deal with the cycle of violence in which the town was embroiled, its efforts were repeatedly undermined by the sheer number of armed groups operating in defiance of its authority, by infighting between its own pragmatists and militants, and by the total lack of coordination, if not outright hostility, between the Committee and its parent body, the Arab Higher Committee (AHC). The latter, the effective government of all the Arabs in Palestine, was headed by the former Mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin al-Husseini, now resident in Cairo. Giving his own fighters free rein in Haifa, the Mufti turned a deaf ear to the Committee's requests and recommendations. Not even the dispatch of an emergency delegation to Cairo in late January, warning that, if terrorist activity did not cease, the result would be the eventual disappearance of the entire Haifa community, had any effect.

Against this background, the National Committee apparently gave up the hope of stemming further flight. Shortly after the return of the delegation from Cairo, a proposal was passed urging improvements in the condition of Palestinian refugees in the states where they now found themselves, and requesting help in settling them there. This was momentous indeed: the official leadership of the second largest Arab community in Mandate Palestine was not only condoning mass flight but suggesting that Arab refugee status be, however temporarily, institutionalized.

As the months passed and Britain's departure from Palestine neared, such views gained further currency. Even the Mufti, who had warned that "the flight of families abroad





Syria and Lebanon to oversee the operation, and preparations began in earnest with the chartering of a ship from an Egyptian company.

By early April 1948, according to Rashid Hajj Ibrahim, the head of the National Committee, the city's Arab populace had dwindled to some 35,000–40,000. (Ibrahim himself, a man who had been active in Haifa's public life for decades, left for Cairo shortly thereafter, never to return.) By the time the final battle for the city was joined a few weeks later, the number had fallen still further, and only about half the town's original community remained.

Not for long: disheartened by the desertion of their local military leaders, and petrified by wildly exaggerated accounts of a Zionist atrocity at the village of Deir Yassin near Jerusalem, the remnant now took to the road. In the early morning of April 22, as Hagana forces battled their way to the downtown market area, thousands streamed into the port, still held by the British army. Within hours, many of these had fled by trains and buses, while the rest awaited evacuation by sea.

What was left of the local Arab leadership now asked the British military to stop the fighting. When this failed, a delegation requested a meeting with the British commander, Major-General Hugh Stockwell, "with a view to obtaining a truce with the Jews." Having learned from Stockwell the Hagana's terms for such a truce, the delegates then left to consult with their peers, in particular asking the Syrian consul in Haifa to inform his government and the Arab League. In no time, the British ambassador in Damascus, P.M. Broadmead, was summoned to a meeting with Shukri al-Quwaitly, the president of Syria.

Reminding the president that neither of them was familiar with the real situation on the ground, Broadmead begged al-Quwaitly "to urge moderation and to take no action which would bring this local Haifa issue on to a wider plane." To this, al-Quwaitly responded that he "was very nervous concerning public opinion," yet refrained from any threat of military intervention. Thus, no instructions from Damascus seem to have





There, after an impassioned plea for peace and reconciliation by the town's Jewish mayor, Shabtai Levy, the assembled delegates went through the truce terms point by point, modifying a number of them to meet Arab objections. Then the Arabs requested a 24-hour recess "to give them the opportunity to contact their brothers in the Arab states." Although this was deemed unacceptable, a briefer break was approved and the meeting adjourned at 5:20.

When the Arabs returned that evening at 7:15, they had a surprise in store: as Stockwell would later put it in his official report, they stated "that they were not in a position to sign the truce, as they had no control over the Arab military elements in the town and that, in all sincerity, they could not fulfill the terms of the truce, even if they were to sign." They then offered, "as an alternative, that the Arab population wished to evacuate Haifa and that they would be grateful for military assistance."

This came as a bombshell. With tears in his eyes, the elderly Levy pleaded with the Arabs, most of whom were his personal acquaintances, to reconsider, saying that they were committing "a cruel crime against their own people." Yaacov Salomon, a prominent Haifa lawyer and the Hagana's chief liaison officer in the city, followed suit, assuring the Arab delegates that he "had the instructions of the commander of the zone . . . that if they stayed on they would enjoy equality and peace, and that we, the Jews, were interested in their staying on and the maintenance of harmonious relations." Even the stoic Stockwell was shaken. "You have made a foolish decision," he thundered at the Arabs. "Think it over, as you'll regret it afterward. You must accept the conditions of the Jews. They are fair enough. Don't permit life to be destroyed senselessly. After all, it was you who began the fighting, and the Jews have won."

But the Arabs were unmoved. The next morning, they met with Stockwell and his advisers to discuss the practicalities of the evacuation. Of the 30,000-plus Arabs still in Haifa, only a handful, they said, wished to stay. Perhaps the British could provide 80 trucks a day, and in the meantime ensure an orderly supply of foodstuffs in the city and its environs? At this, a senior British officer at the meeting erupted: "If you sign your





Within a matter of days, only about 3,000 of Haifa's Arab residents remained in the city.

Far from seeking to drive the Arabs out of Haifa, the Jewish authorities went to considerable lengths to convince them to stay.

On April 22, at the height of the fighting, it distributed a circular noting its ongoing campaign to clear the town of all "criminal foreign bands" so as to allow the restoration of "peace and security and good neighborly relations among all of the town's inhabitants." The following day, a Hagana broadcast asserted that "the Jews did and do still believe that it is in the real interests of Haifa for its citizens to go on with their work and to ensure that normal conditions are restored to the city."

On April 24, a Hagana radio broadcast declared: "Arabs, we do not wish to harm you. Like you, we only want to live in peace. . . . If the Jews and [the] Arabs cooperate, no power in the world will ever attack our country or ignore our rights." Two days later, informing its Arab listeners that "Haifa has returned to normal," the Hagana reported that "between 15,000 and 20,000 Arabs had expressed their willingness to remain in the city," that "Arab employees had been appointed to key posts," and that Arabs had been given "part of the corn, flour, and rice intended for the Jews in Haifa." And on April 27, the Hagana distributed a leaflet urging the fleeing Arab populace to return home: "Peace and order reign supreme across the town and every resident can return to his free life and resume his regular work in peace and security."

Meanwhile, however, as the Jews were attempting to keep the Arabs in Haifa, an ad-hoc body, the Arab Emergency Committee, was doing its best to get them out.

Scaremongering was a major weapon in its arsenal. Some Arab residents received written threats that, unless they left town, they would be branded as traitors deserving of death. Others were told they could expect no mercy from the Jews. Sheikh Abd al-Rahman Murad of the National Committee, who had headed the truce negotiating team, proved particularly effective at this latter tactic: on April 23, he warned a large group of escapees from the neighborhood of Wadi Nisnas, who were about to return to their homes, that if they did so they would all be killed, as the Jews spared not even women





The importance of these actions cannot be overstated. The Emergency Committee was not a random collection of self-appointed vigilantes, as some Palestinian apologists would later argue. Rather, it was the successor to the Haifa National Committee and involved two National Committee members: Farid Saad and Sheikh Murad. In other words, *the evacuation of the Haifa Arab community was ordered, and executed, by the Arab Higher Committee's official local representatives*. The only question is whether those representatives did what they did on their own, or under specific instructions from above.

As I indicated earlier, the Haifa leaders had been extremely reluctant to accept or reject the Hagana's truce terms on their own recognizance: hence the initial appeal to their peers, and hence the request for a 24-hour recess to seek the advice of the Arab states. When this was not granted, and the Committee had to make do with the brief respite granted to it, its delegates proceeded to telephone the AHC office in Beirut for instructions. They were then told explicitly not to sign, but rather to evacuate. Astonished, the Haifa delegates protested, but were assured that "it is only a matter of days" before Arab retaliatory action would commence, and "since there will be a lot of casualties following our intended action, . . . you [would] be held responsible for the casualties among the Arab population left in the town." [7]

Acre- On the morning of March 18, 1948, four Jewish IEC workers left Haifa to repair damaged power lines near Acre. They were riding in an armored car with two British armored vehicles in the front and rear. The Arabs of Acre set a trap for them. When the convoy arrived in Acre, the British armored vehicle went on a mine and the five British soldiers on board were killed. The second armored vehicle immediately turned around and fled towards Haifa. IEC workers were left alone in front of the attackers and murdered.

The Arabs laid siege on the Jewish settlements, including Nahariya who received supplies and help by sea, and the Jews laid siege to Acre and the villages of the area through control of the Krayot and the Acre-Haifa road.





4 The Haganah attack on 25\26 April, with mortars falling in the town centre, thoroughly unnerved the inhabitants, even though only two were wounded and four houses damaged (and the prison population, ‘except the lunatics’, escaped).⁴⁹⁵ On 26 April, one inhabitant wrote:

Most [of the population] has left or is about to leave. We may go to Beirut. The preparations for evacuation . . . pertain to all classes: The rich, the middle, and the poor — they are all preparing to leave and are selling everything they can. Following the evacuation of Haifa, Hawassa and Balad al Sheikh . . . the population of Acre has risen to [sic] 50,000 and there is terrible tension in the town.”

The situation was chaotic: The rich had fled, local government had broken down and the town was in the hands of four vying militia groups. At the end of April, the ALA sent in reinforcements — which further unnerved the population, which saw this as an augury of impending battle.

By 5–7 May, the situation appears to have stabilised. According to the British, the population was down to ‘8,000’, many of the Haifa refugees having moved on, to Lebanon. Others had been moved off the streets into public buildings; and food distribution was running smoothly. But there was still no electricity or fuel. Fear of impending Jewish attack and conquest, and the collapse and departure of Acre’s leadership helped energise the exodus. The mayor apparently fled (to Lebanon) on 11 May, the local militia commander announced his departure the same day or just after, and most of the NC had already left.

The Haganah offensive in Western Galilee, called Operation Ben-Ami (see below), began on 13 May; Acre fell on 17–18 May. The town’s new militia commander, Yunis Naf’a (perhaps accompanied by another Haifa veteran, Amin ‘Izz a Din), fled with his troops by boat to Lebanon on 14 May. The inhabitants were reported ready, indeed eager, to surrender but a new commander, with a band of 70 irregulars, appeared on the scene, Mahmoud al Saffuri, and organised the defense of the Old City. But then Al Saffuri and





screening of all adult males, and acceptance of Israeli rule. Carmel promised that ‘all the local Arabs could stay . . . and carry on with their normal lives’. [8]

So as can be seen, in all these places, the reasons for the Palestinians fled were varied, these were because of fear of Jewish attacks, chaos brought about by Arab militias, abandonment of local leadership and even encouragement to leave by the Arab leadership itself. In all these cases, the Palestinians did not leave because of some act of “expulsion” by the Jews.

In all, about 70,000 Palestinians left Haifa

Jaffa 70,000,

Tiberias 6,000

Safed 11,000

Samakh 3,500

Acre 10,000

Total of 170,000, or about half the number of Palestinians who have left by then.

Benny Morris “The Causes and Character of the Arab Exodus from Palestine: The Israel Defense Forces Intelligence Branch Analysis of June 1948” goes and explain that the final numbers not only include these places, but also those in the neighboring villages who were not under attack but fled out of fear.

(Screenshots from [Gail Ellis](#))



The Intelligence Service then gives a detailed breakdown and explanation of these factors, stressing that 'without doubt, hostile [Haganah / IDF] operations were the main cause of the movement of population'.

The wave of emigration in each district, explains the report, followed hard upon 'the increase and expansion of our [Haganah / IDF] operations in that district'. May brought a major increase in large-scale Jewish operations; so it also witnessed the widespread mass emigration of Arabs. 'The departure of the British . . . of course helped the [Arab] evacuation, but it appears that the British withdrawal freed our hands for action more than it influenced the [Arab] emigration directly.'

The Intelligence Service notes that it was not always the dimensions of a Jewish attack which counted: it was 'mainly the psychological' factors which affected the rate of emigration. The report cites 'surprise', protracted mortar barrages, and use of loudspeakers broadcasting threatening message as factors which had a strong influence in precipitating flight.

An attack on one village or town often affected its neighbours. 'The evacuation of a certain village because of an attack by us prompted in its wake many neighbouring villages [to flee]', states the report. This was especially true of the fall of large villages or towns. 'The fall of Tiberias, Safad, Samakh, Jaffa, Haifa and Acre engendered in their wake many waves of emigrants.' The psychological motive force in operation here was '*im ba'arazim nafta shal-hevet*' ('If the cedars caught fire . . .', a paraphrase of 1 Kings 5: 13).

The report concludes: 'It is possible to say that at least 55 per cent of the total of the exodus was caused by our [Haganah / IDF] operations and by their influence'. To this the Intelligence Service adds the effects of the operations of the dissident Jewish organizations, 'who directly [caused] some 15 per cent . . . of the emigration'. The Intelligence Service notes that the activities of the dissidents were of especial importance in the Jaffa-Tel Aviv area, in the coastal plain to the north, and around Jerusalem. 'Elsewhere, they had no direct effect on the [Arab] evacuation.'

The Intelligence Service cites the 'special effect' of the dissident operation in Deir Yassin and of the 'abduction [at the end of March, 1948] of the five [Arab] notables at Sheikh Muwannis [north of Tel Aviv]'.

The Intelligence Service then gives a detailed breakdown and explanation of these factors, stressing that 'without doubt, hostile [Haganah / IDF] operations were the main cause of the movement of population'.

How many were in fact expelled by the Jewish forces?

According to the report, 2%, according to Benny Morris 5%

/IDF and IZL would have been faced at each site with the successive dilemma: to expel or not to expel. As it was, the population, by taking to its heels at the first whiff of grapeshot, usually solved this possible problem. The report's estimate of the proportion of villages depopulated by calculated, direct Jewish expulsion orders is none the less somewhat low. For the period up to 1 June 1948, something around 5 per cent seems closer to the mark than the 2 per cent cited. Even after adding to this the villagers 'nudged' into flight by deliberate military pressures and psychological assault, one is still left with only a small proportion of the exodus accounted for in this manner.

One must again emphasize that the report and its significance pertain only up to 1 June 1948, by which time some 300,000–400,000 Palestinians had left their homes. A similar number was to leave the Jewish-held areas in the remaining months of the war. The circumstances of the second half of the exodus—during the IDF conquest of Lydda and Ramle, and the central Galilee in July, the northern Negev in October–November, and the northern Galilee in October—are a different story. But for an understanding of the Palestinian exodus until 1 June, one must, according to IDF Intelligence, reach mainly for the vast middle ground between pre-planned, outright IDF expulsion and Arab-engineered, Machiavellian flight.

There, amid the frightening, threatening boom of guns, the loss of confidence in Arab might, the flight of relatives and friends, the abandonment of nearby towns, and a general, vast fear of the uncharted future, one will find the bulk of the pre-June Palestinian refugees.

It is important to emphasize that this figure is also more complex, the figure for example includes the town of Yibna, On 27 May, following the fall of Al-Qubayba and Zarnuqa, most of the population of Yibna fled to Isdud, but armed males were refused entry. On 5 June, when Israeli troops arrived, they found the village almost deserted apart from a



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On the other hand, how many Palestinians were expelled by the Arabs themselves?

About 10%



quarters of Jerusalem to order the women, children, and the old in their areas to leave their homes and move to areas 'far away from the dangers. Any opposition to this order . . . is an obstacle to the holy war . . . and will hamper the operations of the fighters in these districts.'⁸

In early May, units of the Arab Legion entered the town of Beisan and reportedly ordered the evacuation of all women and children.⁹ At about the same time, the Arab Liberation Army was reported to have ordered the villagers in Fureidis, south of Haifa, to 'evacuate the women and children from the village and to make ready to evacuate the village completely'.¹⁰ In general, the IDF Intelligence Service report fails to stress the importance in the Arab exodus of the early departure in many cases from the villages of the women and children. This tended to sap the morale of the menfolk who were left behind to guard the homes and fields, contributing to the final evacuation of villages. Such two-tier evacuations—women and children first, the men following weeks later—occurred in Qumiya in the Jezreel Valley, among the Ghawarina beduin in Haifa Bay, and in various other places.

What then is the significance of the IDF Intelligence Service report in understanding the Palestinian exodus of 1948? To begin with, it thoroughly undermines the traditional official Israeli 'explanation' of a mass flight ordered or 'invited' by the Arab leadership for political-strategic reasons. Quite clearly, according to the report, Arab orders to evacuate villages were restricted to a number of areas, were guided by local strategic considerations, and affected no more than 10 per cent of the Palestinian refugee population. (About half of the villages evacuated because of Arab command, those in the Jerusalem and lower Galilee areas, were in fact subsequently repopulated by their original inhabitants once circumstances had changed.)

The report makes no mention of any blanket order issued over Arab radio stations or through other means, to the Palestinians to evacuate their homes and villages. Had such an order been issued, it

⁸ ISA, FM 2570/11, announcement by the National Committee of Jerusalem, 22





So in fact, at this stage of the war, the Arabs committed more population deportations than the Jews.

And here we have the part nobody on your side ever quotes — many of the Palestinian Arabs simply went back to where they, or their parents had immigrated from i.e. Egypt, Lebanon and Syria. This was not even controversial back then.

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of the refugee communities. The authors note certain patterns. For instance, city-dwellers of rural origin often returned to their ancestral villages, as did Jaffa residents who had originated in Faluja, for example. Similarly, according to the Intelligence Service, city-dwellers who had come, or whose fathers had come, from neighbouring countries tended during the hostilities to return to those countries. Thus many Haifa residents fled directly to Lebanon and Syria. In general, the report points out, urban dwellers, including the rich, had fled directly to their final destinations whereas rural refugees tended to 'hop' through a number of way-stations before reaching their final point of rest.

In conclusion, the reasons for the exodus of the Palestinian Arabs in the 1948 war were much more complex, these included fear, abandonment of the local leadership, chaos brought by the Arab gangs and encouragement by the Arab leadership itself.

In fact, at this stage of the war, more Palestinian Arabs were expelled by Arab armies than by Jewish forces

[1] Shabtai Teveth, "The Palestine Arab Refugee Problem and its Origins," *Middle East Studies*, April 1990, 216–7.

[2] High Commissioner for Palestine to Secretary of State, May 5, 1948, Cunningham Papers. See also: Tzuri to Golani, "News Summary: Tiberias," Apr. 21, 1948, HA 105/143, p. 275; Hagana Operational Directorate, "Logbook of the War of Independence, p. 260; MacMillan, "Palestine: Narrative of Events," Apr. 17/18, 18,





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[4] The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited [2nd Edition] Benny Morris
p. 186

[5] Palestine 1948 Gelber Yoav p. 108

[6] Palestine betrayed by Efraim Karsh p.182

[7] “Were the Palestinians Expelled?” by Efraim Karsh

[8] The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited [2nd Edition] Benny Morris
p. 231

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